



THE UNITED STATES EMBASSY
Windhoek, Namibia Public Affairs Office

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 6, 2015

CONTACT: Priscilla Hernandez
Public Affairs Officer
Phone: 081 128 0816

Namibia Hosts Connect Camps for Young African Leaders

Namibia is hosting young African leaders from four countries for a two-week Connect Camp and nine Namibians have been selected to participate along with their colleagues from Botswana, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Zambia.

The U.S. Embassy-sponsored Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) Connect Camp, which began on Tuesday, allows young African leaders to learn how to collaborate and network with American and other African experts and with each other to launch community development projects that address social needs.

"The training allows participants to develop innovative strategies that build on their professional skills, engage in hands-on experiences with low-bandwidth technologies, conduct community outreach, and build their capacity through mentoring, networking and using strategic leadership for social change," said U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Officer Priscilla Hernandez.

Among the participants are returned alumni of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, the flagship program of President Barack Obama's YALI program that embodies President Obama's commitment to invest in the future of young Africans. They include Fellows who met with President Obama in 2010 and 2014 and now serve their countries as seasoned Namibian leaders who mentor aspiring young leaders.

Mentor Elizabeth Hamupembe (27), who also participated in the 2014 YALI fellowship program, said the Connect Camp is a great platform to sort out and build on the skills of young leaders in Namibia as it gives them the opportunity to showcase their talents. "If we have more programs like that of YALI, I believe more young leaders will emerge. YALI contributes to the Namibian economy by investing in our future leaders," she said.

Mentee Albertina Tobias (28) said the program has given her the ability to connect with other young African leaders from neighboring countries who share similar interests as hers. "Since joining the camp, I have connected with other young Zambian nationals, who want to venture into design, textile and decor projects like I do," she said. She further explained that the program complements her current studies in economics.

Funded by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the Connect Camp is administered by the Institute for International Journalism at Ohio University with support from the U.S. Embassy, the University of Namibia, and the Namibia-United States Alumni Association, an association established by Namibians who benefitted from U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs.

Dr. Yusuf Kalyango, a course facilitator representing Ohio University, said, “The U.S. Department of State supports young African leaders as they spur growth and prosperity, strengthen democratic governance, and enhance peace and security. Through programs like the YALI Connect Camp, the U.S. Department of State works to build friendly, peaceful relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries in areas of academic, cultural, sports, and professional exchange as well as through public-private partnerships.”

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